

Supporting Kinship Connections Act (S. 2543)
Senator Heitkamp (D-ND) and Senator Young (R-IN)

The ongoing opioid crisis has left many children living with grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends as their parents suffer from addiction. According to the U.S. Census, approximately 2.5 million children live with these caregivers without either of their parents in the home. However, as more and more grandparents and other caregivers are stepping in to raise children, also called “kinship care,” they need assistance in meeting the needs of the children they are raising as they navigate complex, unfamiliar systems.

Kinship Navigator Programs provide this support by assisting kinship caregivers in learning about, finding, and using health and mental health services, financial and legal assistance, substance abuse prevention and treatment, housing, support groups, and other services. These navigator programs also promote effective partnerships among public and private agencies to ensure kinship families are adequately served. However, most states do not have kinship navigator programs and those that do typically service a single geographic region.

Current Policy

The Family First Prevention Act, passed into law as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, provides flexibility for states to use Title IV-E funds for Evidence-Based Kinship Navigator Programs. However, not every state currently operates a Kinship Navigator Program, and not all existing programs currently comply with the evidence standard required by the law – which is scheduled to go into effect in October 2018. The estimated annual cost of statewide kinship navigator programming ranges from \$200,000 to \$300,000 annually.

Legislation

The Supporting Kinship Connections Act (S. 2543) fills this need by providing funding for two years to help states, tribes, and territories to create or expand their own Kinship Navigator Program. Funds can also be used to help existing programs come into compliance with the evidence standard in the Family First Prevention Act.

This discretionary program would authorize \$15 million per year for FY2019 and FY2020 in formula grants based on child population within the state, tribe or territory. They would be allowed to contract with a non-profit that has experience in working with foster children or children in kinship care arrangements to provide the service. Any remaining funding (from states that don’t opt to draw down) would be redistributed among states that did opt in. A set-aside of five percent of the funds would be reserved for tribes; another five percent would be reserved for the Department of Health and Human Services to provide technical assistance.

Supporters

Generations United, Futures Without Violence, Family Focused Treatment Association, National Association of Social Workers, National Alliance of Children’s Trust & Prevention Funds, American Psychological Association